Conklin In Winnipeg

WELL known motion picture production critic on a Winnipeg newspaper this week gave out his observations and impressions of last year's pictures in the following article.

"In making a selection of the outstanding pictures I have seen in Winnipeg in 1936, one is embarrassed by a wealth of material. Offerings during the past year, both from Hollywood and Britain, were definitely better than the average of previous years. Picture quality is improving. Photography is sharper, direction more intelligent and, to my mind, most important, there is a decided improvement in the stories from which pictures are made.

The year showed a tendency toward modern comedy, clean but clever, biting, pungent comedy, demonstrating a sophisticated outlook on a complicated life. Plays of protest, popular on the stage, did not find their way to the screen in such number or variety. Action and mystery plays proved as popular as ever, but there was a notable falling off in the appeal of the extreme and sometimes tawdry love stories — in fact the general trend was in the direction of more intelligent screen entertainment, a notable increase in the number and quality of historical or semi-historical pictures with a fair sprinkling of the classics. This is a distinctly hopeful sign, and judging from the big productions in preparation for the present year, the improvement in art quality is likely to continue.

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"The Great Ziegfeld"

THE biggest box office winners of the years were, first "The Great Ziegfeld" — which cost an enormous sum to produce, but brought it all back and a whole lot more into the box offices. Then came that homely comedy, comparatively inexpensive, but which broke many records, "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town", in which Gary Cooper and Jean Arthur had the leading roles. This was a Frank Capra production and rates him orchids for a very fine directorial effort. Whether the best of the year is a matter of opinion on which I do not care to pronounce. At any rate the picture was an immense success, enhanced Cooper's reputation, definitely placed Jean Arthur in stellar ranks, and brought two "pixilated" sisters out of obscurity into the front rank as screen character workers.

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Box-Office Astaire and Rogers

"SAN FRANCISCO", "Follow the Fleet" and "Swing Time" ranked high as money makers. It will be noted that this list gives Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, two of the big financial successes.

"San Francisco" was especially notable for its very fine earthquake sequences and also for particularly good work by Clark Gable and Jeanette MacDonald. I am inclined to place Gable's effort in this as among the best he has yet made.

"Captain Blood" was another remarkable picture. It made the fortunes of Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland. Flynn's second starring venture, "Charge of the Light Brigade", also ranks high, but hardly touched the peak for acting values, as did "Captain Blood". And despite his successes Flynn is not yet to be regarded as an all around first rank actor.

"The Tale of Two Cities"

ORCHIDS to Ronald Colman for excellent work in "The Tale of Two Cities". His Sydney Carton was a wonderful performance. Much credit, too, to the director for the mob scenes in this picture, notably the street riots which were much better done than the storming of the Bastile in the same production.

THE finest British picture I have seen in 1936 was "Nine Days a Queen", starring Nova Pilbeam. In this the star did excellent work, but the real honors must be accorded to Sir Cedric Hardwicke, for his unforgetable portrayal of Warwick.

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"Show Boat"

"Show Boat", another outstanding picture, merits mention for two things. The remarkable work of Irene Dunne and the vocal contributions of Paul Robeson.

"The Country Doctor", too, placed Jean Hersholt in the best role he has had since "Grand Hotel", and proved a decidedly popular attraction.

Of "Green Pastures" I would say — a great picture that failed to click. Story, acting, direction left nothing to be desired, but the beauty of Marc Connolly's fable seemed to some degree lost. The run of audiences did not like it, despite its high artistic qualities.

WHILE the year produced nothing quite as good as its class as "The Thin Man", yet William Powell had to his credit two distinct hits — the name part in "Ziegfeld", and the lead in "My Man Godfrey". Myrna Loy did not do so well, being poorly placed in regard to parts.

* * *

Popular Robert Taylor

THE year's sensation, in the affections of the fans, was Robert Taylor. Why, I can't tell you, for in my opinion this young man is far from a good actor. He has physical appearance, appeal, and "it", but in acting finesse still has much to learn. However, he is young and the fact remains that he is today probably the most popular of all leading men, rivalling Clark Gable's popularity when that actor was at his peak.

Among the actors and actresses who made notable progress during the year are Barbara Stanwyck and Spencer Tracy. Miss Stanwyck, after an initial success a few years ago, suffered through poor casting, but 1936 saw her in excellent roles which she played with distinction.

Spencer Tracy, too, merits much kudos. A comparative outlaw at the beginning of the year, due, I am informed, to studio disputes as to salary and contracts, he fought his way back to an outstanding position. Hard work in such pictures as "Fury" contributed to his success.

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"Advance In Color"

The year marked a distinct advance in the use of color on the screen — "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine" being particularly fine in this respect. There is still much improvement due in this angle of presentation.

As for the biggest flop — again a matter of opinion, but I am inclined to give the award to the H. G. Wells' picture, "Things To Come". This did not live up to advance notices, and failed to create a great deal of enthusiasm.

Alexander Korda's "Rembrandt" Attracts Unusual Interest at Toronto Opening

Australian Film Digest

CENSORSHIP inconsistencies crop up again. Chief Film Censor Creswell O'Reilly expunges nude heroine underwater swimming and blackfellow strangling sequences from Expeditionary's "Uncivilized" for export overseas *only*. O'Reilly is also empowered to act as State Victorian censor so automatically declared these shots clipped for exhibition in Victoria.

Expeditionary squawked and Victorian Appeals Censor, Prof. W. O. Osborne agreed, over-rode O'Reilly and allowed censored sequences to remain. So what?

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DISTRIBUTION film record for any Aussie key city chalked up by M-G-M getting its pics into seven Sydney first run shows. Leo was on display in features and shorts the same week at Prince Edward (first time this house hasn't been Paramount for many years), St. James, Mayfair, Cameo, Civic, Plaza (dual two week revival "The Thin Man" and "Naughty Marietta"), Liberty.

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THE New Zealand Trade Minimum Price Committee is rapping exhibitors for the giveway racket. A number of cases have come up for consideration concerning gift nights, competitions, etc. Breaches of the standard contract have been committed. Past warnings had no effect.

Committees will now go out after offenders in a big way and will bring exhibitors to book who attempt such illegalities.

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DARING New Zealand aviatrix, Jean Batten who achieved a record time solo flight from England to New Zealand, via Australia, was signed up by Amalgamated Theatres for a personal appearance tour throughout their New Zealand chain. Figure about $2,000 per week on percentage basis will work out at a record for Aussie or Enzed personal appearance tour.

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Osgood Perkins, Victor Moore and Chas. D. Brown featured in Warner Bros. "Golddiggers of 1937".

Highlights of Dominion Life Prove Profitable Box-Office

(*Special to The Digest*)

By "McSTAY"

CANADA'S smart showmen have learned by now that their audiences want highlights of the Canadian scene as part of their entertainment film fare, whether this be exemplified in short subjects or in the newsreel content. At no time more than in '36 was this fact borne out; Canada is taking a place of increasing importance in world affairs and this is being reflected on the screen.

Keeping pace with the recent strides in motion picture technique, Associated Screen News has kept a step ahead of these developments. During the past year, it has placed in operation a fine addition to the original building, providing increased laboratory facilities and work-rooms. Chief among the many added facilities is a specially-designed sound studio, acoustically-treated and air-conditioned.

The new installed Wide Range sound equipment ensures the faithful recording of sound, whether this be musical or vocal. That 1936 was a most successful season for Associated Screen product is an indication of the quality of its work. Theatre managers throughout Canada, more and more during the year just past, have come to rely on the slogan, "An Associated Screen Picture" and "An Associated Screen Trailer".

OUTSTANDING was the success of the "Canadian Cameo" series which present highlights of Canadian life. These continued to have a splendid audience-reception, judging from trade reports. "Making Mounties", filmed at the Regina headquarters of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, shows the training of the scarlet-coated guardians of the law and their mounts. "Vancouver Vignette" is the latest release in that series dealing with highlights of Canadian cities.

Nor was sport forgotten. "This Badminton Racket" is a fast-moving film dealing with one of the Dominion's most popular indoor athletic activities; "Point of Honour" traces the history of defence with the sword throughout the centuries, recreated by some of Canada's outstanding fencers. Significant has been the revival of "She Climbs to Conquer", dealing with mountaineering in the Canadian Rockies; "Grey Owl's Little Brother", which treats of hitherto unphotographed activities of the beaver; and "Let's Go Skiing", another truly-Canadian sport that is full of thrills.

AS Canadian correspondent for all the major newsreels, Associated Screen News maintains crews of cameramen and technicians throughout the Dominion, ever ready to get to the scene of news happenings in the shortest possible time. Due to the importance of such news-events as the Moose River Mine tragedy, the Vimy pilgrimage, and the visit to Canada of President Roosevelt, Canadian newsreel stories have enjoyed a greater international distribution than ever before.

The production of special trailers continues to be an important activity of Associated Screen News. One of the most comprehensive cinematic campaigns ever undertaken on Canada's screens was the recent Christmas seals appeal wherein, by the co-operation of theatre managers throughout the Dominion, 325 prints in English and 50 in French, were simultaneously shown from coast to coast during a three-week period in December. A large number of topical and seasonable trailers were produced during the past year, including a new National Anthem (George VI) trailer, which all managers will need.

Average Wage For Extras For 1936 Is $9.02 a Day. Total Extra Wages, $2,420,453

Radio Film Digest

By JAMES LEWIS SMITH

THE first program on the new Varsity Show series, sponsored by the Pontiac Motor Company, took place last Friday night, originating in the Hill Auditorium of the University of Michigan, at Ann Arbor.

With John Held, Jr., as Master of Ceremonies, this series got off to a good start, with plenty of interest to the Radio fan, contained in the broadcast. The music was exceptionally fine, largely due to the efforts of the Michigan Glee Club, which contributed several noteworthy numbers. College songs, skits, and some interesting information regarding the University, and a number played on the new Carillon, provided some excellent entertainment. A skit by two of the students, a take-off on Walter Winchell and Bob Burns, deserves special mention.

Program is heard over the Red Network of the National Broadcasting Company, Friday nights, 10.30-11.00 EST.

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PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT will be heard over the air on Monday, February 15th, from 10.00 to 11.00 P.M. EST, when he addresses a dinner given in honour of Postmaster General James A. Farley, who, rumour tells us, is retiring soon from public life. Others heard on the broadcast will include Vice-President Garner, Senator Joseph T. Robinson and Mr. Farley. Broadcast over the WABC-Columbia Network.

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"CHARLIE McCARTHY"—positively no relation to a Film exexcutive of the same name—is one of radio's newest comedy stars. Charlie is the wise-cracking dummy of Edgar Bergen, the ventriloquist, whom Rudy Vallee has just signed for his Variety Hour.

Bergen is the straight man, and his dummy, the comedian. They've been together for 17 years, having toured the world several times. They started their theatrical career on an old Redpath Chautauqua circuit, played in Keith-Orpheum vaudeville, appeared in English music halls, and starred, in Swedish, in Rolfe's Revue in Stockholm.

Bergen has dispelled the popular conception that ventriloquists were a radio impossibility. Bergen makes you feel that you can see him and the dummy enjoying their animated tete-a-tete.

Program—Rudy Vallee Variety Hour, NBC-Red Network, Thursday, 8.00 p.m., EST. Sponsor — Fleischmann Yeast Co.

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VINCENT LOPEZ, CBS "Speedshow" maestro, has added "How Do You Doodle?" to his growing list of song novelties. Now, to "doodle" is to scribble surrealist nothing on telephone scratch pads while listening to a long-winded caller, on table cloths while absorbed in thoughts of the steak dinner momentarily to arrive, on magazine cover margins in abstract moods, and on a variety of other scarcely apt places. The word was popularized in the film, "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town". Lopez tells the story of doodling in his song. He's an inveterate one himself.

JUDGE W. C. WILLIAMS, of Oklahoma City, the nation's only personal receiver for bankrupt families, was one of the six featured guests on Phillips Lord's We, The People broadcast Sunday, January 24, at 5.00 p.m., EST. NBC-Blue Network.

Judge Williams told how he helps persons of small incomes adjust their debts with their creditors so as to avoid court judgments, salary garnishments and other unsatisfactory legal entanglements.

Williams, a former newspaper man who became a lawyer, was elected a justice of the peace in 1932. Most cases brought before him were for collections of debts against small wage earners who had been caught in the depression.

Adopting the role of "Debt Doctor", Judge Williams induced plaintiffs and defendants to get together out of courts and he advised them how, in most cases, the debts could be paid on the installment plan.

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FRED MacMURRAY, star of Paramount pictures, has replaced Dick Powell, as Master of Ceremonies for the Hollywood Hotel program, on Friday nights. The Warner Brothers' star will be heard over a network of stations owned by the Warner Bros. and Hearst interests, originating at KFWB. More news on this next week.

* * *

"JOHNNY PRESENTS", a new weekly series of programs of music and drama, will start on the Columbia network Saturday, February 13, from 8.30 to 9.00 P.M., EST. (Rebroadcast for western listeners at 11.30 p.m., EST). The sponsors are Phillip Morris and Company. Johnny Roventini, 43-inch-high "call-boy", will be master-of-ceremonies, introducing Phil Duey, baritone; the "Swing Fourteen", a chorus of 14 mixed voices; the Giersdorf Sisters, vocal duo; the "Four Rogues", a male quartet. Charles Martin will present a regular feature of "thrill" sketches.

* * *

Charles Butterworth, popular comedian of the Packard Program, who has a featured role in the RKO Radio picture, "Rainbow on the River".

Flood Broadcasts By Louisville Times-Journal Over WHAS Most Thrilling Broadcast of the Year

Washington Film Digest

(Special to The Digest by George W. Mehrtens, Columbia Trade Press Staff Correspondent)

WASHINGTON, D.C., Jan. 25—(CTP)

DECLARING that the block-booking bill would eventually wear itself out, Adolph Zukor, Chairman of the Board of Paramount, arrived in Washington last week to attend his 25th anniversary Capital dinner at the fashionable Carlton Hotel here. With as many political stars as there are stellar lights in the world of cinema in attendance, Capital City motion picture leaders gathered to pay tribute to one of the leaders of contemporary motion picture history.

"The block booking bill now pending before the present Congress is as unsound as it is unworkable," Zukor told Canadian Motion Picture Digest in an interview before the dinner. "It just won't work."

Asked if he thought the bill would have any chance of passage this session despite his contention that it was unsound, the Paramount executive replied: "No, certainly not. It will wear itself out. This thing has been going on for years and has never gotten anywhere; why should it be any different this year?"

Mr. Zukor was equally as pessimistic concerning the pending Culkin bill designed to set up a Federal Motion Picture Board for the control of Motion pictures, as the Federal Communications Commission now controls Radio.

"That's no good either," Zukor said. "In the first place it is relatively impossible to harness talent. Brains must have perfect freedom if they are to function creatively."

The Motion Picture Industry, Mr. Zukor said, was responsible for the employment of thousands of people. It was, he said, well able to regulate itself and had proved so over the period of years.

Speaking of business in general Mr. Zukor commented that the Industry was perhaps fifteen or twenty percent better in the year 1936 over 1935 and added that he was definitely optimistic for the coming year of 1937. Since times were obviously better, he said, the Motion Picture Industry contemplated the production of the bigger and better type of picture.

"Just as gangster-underworld productions appeared to be the public wish some years ago," Mr. Zukor pointed outt, "the singing-dancing type seems to be the order of today. If the American and Canadian public likes this type of production then it is our job to give them what they want."

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FOLLOWING weeks of litigation the United States Supreme Court this week handed down an order granting the petition of Hiram Steelman, trustee in bankruptcy for William Fox, for temporary restraining order and injunction in the case against the All Continent Corporation.

The court further ordered that the petition is granted until further action is taken up the writ of certerari and the All Continent Corporation is enjoined from proceeding in any manner against the petitioners in a suit of equity now pending in the United States District Court.

All Continent Corporation originally brought suit in Pennsylvania in an effort to clarify title to certain securities in possession of Philadelphia brokers. It was stated that the value of assets transferred to All Continent by Fox at one time totaled some $7,000,000.

The circuit court, however, reversed the bankrupt court and vacated the restraining order and Steelman was granted his petition for temporary restrain and injunction.

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THE Social Security Board will soon again flash its activities across the screens of the nation it was learned here this week, when announcement was made that on February 15th this New Deal Agency will release its fourth news-reel trailer tentatively entitled "New Frontiers for Old".

As was the case with the other three previous releases Pathe was the lowest bidder, and is consequently making the picture. The cost of the new production will run approximately the same as those in the past, averaging some $4,000. The new film treating on the unemployment compensation angle of the Social Security set-up will be distributed to exhibitors free of charge.

It is understood that there were two other production companies bidding, which bid as high as six thousand dollars. Social Security officials, according to reports canvassed practically every motion picture producing company in the country but could get no response other than from the three.

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EFFECTIVELY dashing previous reports to the ground, a spokesman of the National Catholic Welfare Council, this week declared that there is absolutely no connection whatsoever between the newly formed legion of decency in Australia and the functioning body in the United States.

While the Australian branch found the inspiration for its establishment in the United States and will be guided by the classification of the American Legion of Decency for the present time, the affiliation is only a moral and informed one.

In an effort to make the work of the Committee thoroughly effective in Australia it is proposed to extract a promise from all Roman Catholic people through the parish churches and schools, not to attend films which the Committee condemns. If a new Committee were to be established in Canada, for instance, it would have to originate in the Dominion where it expected to function since the new Australian Committee is not the spearhead for any kind of a world drive.

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FORESHADOWING legislation which may soon closely affect the Motion Picture Industry, Senator William E. Borah, Idaho's veteran Senator, this week introduced his corporation license bill which would place the Motion Picture and other industries directly under the supervision of the Federal Trade Commission.

The measure would empower the Federal Trade Commission to license and revoke the license of any corporation violating its provisions or the anti-trust laws. Annual reports to the commission would be required with data covering earnings, properties, organizations, capitalization, profits, dividends and business methods.

The bill would further authorize the commission to investigate violations or suspected violations and parties agrieved by its orders could obtain a review from the Circuit Court of Appeals.

M-G-M 1935 Salaries Include Garbo, $332,500; Beery, 278,749;